

## 2003 PVO CONFERENCE: PVC-ASHA VERIFICATION, DOCUMENTATION AND UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION

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PVC has spent the last year putting the final touches on its new strategy and getting new mechanisms in place to implement this strategy. One of our major immediate tasks now is to come up with a way to prove that we're actually achieving this strategy – it's great for us to say "here are the results we plan to achieve" – but AID expects us to be able to document those results over time as well. Thus, we are working right now to develop a Performance Management Plan or PMP which will allow us to aggregate the work of the wide variety of activities we fund into a few relatively simple indicators that we can track over the next several years, and which someone outside PVC and the PVO community can look at and see the importance and significance of what we're doing.

Those of you less familiar with AID-speak may be asking - what is a PMP? A PMP is a "performance management tool used by an Operating Unit and Strategic Objective team to help plan and manage the process of assessing and reporting progress towards achieving a Strategic Objective" Simply put, it's a way to measure if your activities are actually having the impact you anticipated. The need to measure our results has been an increasing focus government wide. USAID revised its internal programming policies beginning in the early 1990's following a broader U.S. Government effort (championed by then Vice-President Al Gore) to reinvent the way the public sector works by looking at private sector experience. As part of this revolution, government agencies are required to focus their planning processes and organizational structures on intended program results. In other words, we need to be able to say what we are getting for spending the people's money. This is an important goal and a worthwhile one. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), passed by Congress in 1993, holds federal agencies accountable for achieving program results and requires federal agencies to define program goals and measure performance toward their achievement on an annual basis.

USAID has been a leader in this area, and yet our performance measurement challenges are some of the most complex in the U.S. government. Working in the number and variety of countries that we do, in the number of areas that we do, with the number of partners that we do makes telling our story in a coherent way a real challenge. The need to "roll-up" the results we achieve in the field to larger Agency achievements that can be reported in a meaningful and concise way has been an ongoing challenge for USAID. We tell you all this because in many ways the experience of PVC mirrors that of the Agency. PVC, as you have heard yesterday and today, implements a diverse portfolio that cuts across the agency sectorally, geographically and thematically.

This presents us with a great challenge in reporting our results, but also a great opportunity. The challenge for us as an office is to figure out how to take all of the amazing achievements of our partners and convey both the depth and breadth of those achievements to our Washington management. This is critically important, because if

we want to continue supporting your efforts we need to be able to demonstrate our achievements and tell our story. We want to work with you and get your input on the best ways to do that, not as a one-off kind of thing, but on a continuing basis. We really are all in this together.

The diversity of programs is our reporting challenge. But it is also our greatest asset for learning. We have a unique opportunity to examine activities across the spectrum of contexts and learn about what works and where it works and why. If we can, in partnership with you, synthesize and disseminate those lessons we will have made a major contribution to development knowledge. We look forward to doing that.

Further, while we must develop this PMP to verify the results we're achieving with our funds under the new strategy, we also know that activities funded under PVC's earlier strategies and the PVO-cooperative community in general are already working together in enhancing NGO capacities; this is something that PVC funding has supported for years, although the previous strategies may not have as clearly or explicitly stated this as the focus. Thus, in addition to the new strategy and the new implementation and results monitoring mechanisms we are putting in place, we have a body of experience and knowledge from past grants that we need highlight and share. As a result, we will be actively pursuing a variety of research topics related to organizational sustainability.

We'd like to begin by eliciting inputs and experiences from those of you who have already been working in this area for many years. We have a list of questions and topics that have occurred to us (see attachment, below). If any of you in the PVO community have thoughts on any of these topics, we'd appreciate hearing what your experiences have been and what you've learned. If you think our topics are not the key ones, we would be glad to hear what you think the main topics are.

The topics and questions we have raised thus far come from PVO reports we have read and from PVO meetings we have attended, in which we have heard trends and themes that we would like to be collecting and reporting more systematically. As we gather these themes, we will check back with many of you to verify what we've heard and to be sure we're telling the story correctly. Then we'd like to start sharing these organizational stories with others, e.g., missions, other USAID/Washington offices, other donors.

Some examples of the kinds of themes we've been hearing already:

- (1) NGO ownership and commitment to a specific approach is essential to the sustainability of service delivery – and perhaps to the sustainability of the organization itself;
- (2) organizational development takes time, and perhaps we need to scale back our expectations for service delivery and technical results to allow the time needed to strengthen the NGO adequately and effectively; and
- (3) organizations in conflict areas are probably especially weak and there may be specific things we need to be sure to strengthen first, and perhaps fast, before we attempt to deliver services through NGOs in particularly unstable areas.

Many of these themes we identify may seem obvious to all of us since we work in the area of organizational development. However, these themes may also be the very

things that are so obvious that we don't share them with others who may be focusing exclusively on delivering services and don't have the time or the expertise to focus on the organizational side.

As we think more about the lessons we've already learned and things we already know, we can be looking for ways not only to disseminate this body of knowledge but also for broader ways to put it into action, for example, in new strategies and activities being developed throughout the donor community. As part of this effort, we may want to think about how we can and should be drawing in additional relevant partners-- e.g., private sector, local governments, other donors -- to use our organizational sustainability experience to enhance their own development efforts. For example, where appropriate, we might consider encouraging American medical and educational facilities -- universities, hospitals, research institutions, for example -- to combine forces with us to improve health care, education, and job-training opportunities. One idea might be to try linking ASHA-funded university and hospital programs with more local-level NGO programs to improve vertical health and education-job skills programs that strengthen overall health and education systems in a country. We may especially want to be working more closely with the sector-specific experts to ensure that sustainability is given a higher profile so that the technical results being achieved can be maintained beyond the period of donor funding.

We look forward to working with you all in the coming year in strengthening NGOs and networks of NGOs and furthering their ability to deliver development services sustainably over the long term; we also look forward to working with you in learning from one another, teasing out and finding ways to best articulate some of the organizational development themes and lessons we've learned but perhaps haven't stated as clearly or as loudly as we could have; and we look forward to finding ways to most effectively disseminate these lessons to as wide an audience as possible in order to share our own skills and strengths to the benefit of the development cause.

**Attachment:**  
**PVC-ASHA Short-Term Research Topics**

- (1) Definitions of organizational development and capacity building -- There are a wide variety of definitions of "organizational development" and "capacity building" and what they entail/include. Are there any observations and experiences that would help to reach better -- more consistent and clearly defined -- understandings of "organizational development" and/or "capacity building" that would help facilitate implementation across countries, sectors and/or PVOs/NGOs/donors?
- (2) "Thresholds" of NGO development -- Is there a minimum level of NGO "capacity," below which USAID and PVOs should not attempt to do service delivery business with/through the NGO? If so, what is that "threshold" level? What does it involve (e.g., are there some specific "capacity" components -- financial, organizational, strategic, human resource -- that are more critical than others)? Is there a minimum level of NGO capacity required before networks can be effective and productive?

- (3) Minimum standard for “survivability” – Is there a minimum level of NGO “capacity,” below which the NGO is too fragile to withstand natural or man-made shocks (e.g., conflict)? On the other hand, is there a minimum level of NGO “capacity,” above which the NGO can withstand natural or man-made shocks? If so, what is this level? And what does it involve, in terms of specific components of capacity? Are there any lessons learned on the costs and/or benefits of network on “survivability”? (Yes, 3 is very similar to 2; the primary difference is that 3 is asking about the NGO failing completely as an organization, while 2 is less extreme, focusing only on adequate service delivery.)
- (4) Relative factors in organizational development/capacity building – Are there some components of organizational capacity that should be built or strengthened prior to others? Are there some components that should receive priority over others? Do we know anything about relative resource emphasis on one component of capacity over others that is worth sharing with other PVOs, missions and donors?
- (5) Best practices – Are there any best – or most promising – practices in organizational development, sustainability, and/or capacity building that can be distilled and shared? Are there lessons learned on what works – and what doesn’t – that should be documented?
- (6) Sectoral differences – Is there any reason to believe that capacity building differs with the type of services being delivered? Do NGOs working in one sector (e.g., health) typically have more/less trouble with one component of capacity building than an NGO working in another sector (e.g., microfinance)? If so, is there any evidence on why such differences occur? Are there any lessons that can be drawn from this evidence?
- (7) PVO/NGO perceptions of organizational sustainability/capacity building – Are there significant differences in how PVOs (and donors) perceive organizational development/capacity building and how local NGOs and other host country institutions perceive it? If so, what are these differences? And do they affect our collective ability to actually provide improved service delivery? Are there observations on how any differences in perceptions can be overcome or at least managed productively?